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Will California Zionise K-12 Education?

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Factual information about Israel and Palestine may soon be outlawed in the California K-12 school system. Assembly Bill 715 is currently on Governor Newsom's desk. The legislation was recently rushed through the California legislature, amended just days before passage, and voted on at 1 a.m. with almost no time for public comment.

The hurry is intentional because opposition grows whenever people learn about it. AB715 is opposed by educators across the spectrum, including the California Teachers Association, California Faculty Association, Association of School Board Administrators, California School Boards Association, and Council of UC Faculty Associations. Civil rights organizations, such as ACLU Action, also oppose the legislation.

What It Purports to Do

Assembly Bill 715 aims to "prevent antisemitism." It asserts, "Jewish and Israeli pupils are facing a widespread surge in antisemitic discrimination, harassment, and bullying. In many cases, such discrimination, harassment, and bullying has been so severe and pervasive that it has placed Jewish pupils at risk, or completely impeded their ability to learn or engage in school programs or activities."

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is the main source for the claim that there is a "widespread surge" in antisemitism. Their accuracy is widely disputed. As the Jewish Currents publication reports, "A line-by-line reassessment of the organization's data illuminates the flaws in its methodology."

There is already protection in the California Education Code for genuine cases of discrimination or bullying. Section 220 of the code specifies that "No person shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic that is contained in the definition of hate crimes." Through their ethnicity and religion, Jewish students are clearly a protected group. So are Israeli students. They can file claims of discrimination under existing legislation.

What It Will Actually Do

AB715 aims to expand the definition of "discrimination" and outlaw any textbook, instructional material, or course content that "would subject a pupil to unlawful discrimination."

But what is "unlawful discrimination"? AB715 specifies that the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism is the basis for identifying antisemitism. That report asserts, "Jewish

students and educators are targeted for derision and exclusion on college campuses, often because of their real or perceived views about the State of Israel. When Jews are targeted because of their beliefs or their identity, when Israel is singled out because of anti-Jewish hatred, that is antisemitism." The document claims, "an unshakeable commitment to the State of Israel's right to exist, its legitimacy, and its security. In addition, we recognize and celebrate the deep historical, religious, cultural, and other ties many American Jews and other Americans have to Israel."

The U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism embraces the controversial "working definition" of antisemitism advanced by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). This definition has been widely criticized for its conflation of antisemitism with anti-zionism and criticism of the State of Israel. Over 100 human rights and civil society organizations reject the IHRA definition. Yet this is the definition which AB715 is based on.

If passed, AB715 will result in strict regulation of education and educational material that might subject Jewish students to "unlawful discrimination". Facts and informed opinions about the reality in Israel and Palestine may be considered "antisemitic" or likely to cause discomfort. For example, students will not learn:

- The International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Israeli PM Netanyahu charging him with crimes against humanity.
- The International Association of Genocide Scholars determined that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.
- Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Israel's B'Tselem have ALL independently investigated and determined that Israel is an apartheid state.
- The greatest scientist of the 20th century, Albert Einstein, was against the creation a Jewish state and sought a binational Arab Jewish state in Palestine.
- In 1948, Einstein, Hanna Arendt, and other Jewish leaders denounced Menachim Begin as a Nazi and fascist.
- The Israeli newspaper Haaretz documents a Jewish scholar who was zionist but now supports Hamas and considers their armed resistance legitimate and legal.

All of the above are facts and assessments by credible organizations and individuals. AB715 is so vague yet sweeping that such education about Israel and Palestine may be considered "unlawful discrimination" against a pro-Israel student and therefore prohibited.

The Costs of AB715

If passed, AB715 will cost Californians dearly. It mandates the creation of a new Office of Civil Rights with an Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator and staff producing regular reports, investigations, etc. Incredibly, AB715 allows any member of the public to file a complaint, even anonymously. These complaints must be investigated and responded to within time requirements. School boards and superintendents, already busy, will have to spend precious time and resources investigating each and every complaint in a timely manner. The predictable result will be fear or prohibition on saying anything about Israel or Palestine. The Antisemitism Prevention Coordinator is also mandated to provide antisemitism education to teachers, administrators, and school boards.

Under California's "Golden State Plan to Counter Antisemitism," millions of dollars are appropriated for education about the genocide which ended 80 years ago. Meanwhile, there

is no funding and it appears the California legislature seeks to prevent education about the genocide happening today in Gaza.

Making it even worse, AB715 invites lawsuits which will further burden the education system. The legislation says, “Civil law remedies, including but not limited to injunctions, restraining orders, or other remedies, may also be available to complainants.” Under AB715, as a gift for zionist activists, any member of the public can be a complainant.

AB715 Should Not Be Signed into Law

The organizations representing California teachers, adminstrators, school superintendents and school boards are ALL against this legislation. AB715 will be costly, wasteful, and damaging to K-12 education in California. Where there are genuine cases of discrimination or bullying, existing legislation is adequate. All students are protected against discrimination or bullying under section 220 of the California Education Code. Where Jewish or Israeli students have been victimized, they have the same recourse as all students. They do not need preferential treatment.

Teaching facts and expert opinions about Israel and Palestine is not antisemitic. It is history and current events.

Feeling uncomfortable when learning some facts or opinions is not being a victim; it is being educated. People can disagree and have different perceptions; they should not be prevented from hearing facts and different perspectives.

The intent of AB715 is clear: to restrict factual information about an important region of the world and to punish educators who present the Palestinian and anti-zionist Jewish perspective. Governor Newsom should not sign the legislation. To encourage him to make the right decision, contact him via this link.

This legislation does not prevent antisemitism; it actually promotes it by demonstrating that major Jewish organizations and the Jewish Legislative Caucus have the power to push this legislation which will deny the history and current reality of the Palestinian people. Meanwhile, Jewish Voice for Peace and organizations across the education profession are working hard to stop this assault on the California education system.

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